

The Army in Kordofan: War of Attrition and Tactical Redeployment



Since the beginning of this week, the Sudanese army has launched a new military campaign across North and South Kordofan. Relying on swift strikes aimed at severing supply lines before repositioning, the army has achieved a new balance of power on the ground in what is emerging as a decisive front in the protracted conflict.

Following the fall of El Fasher to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on October 26, attention shifted to the greater Kordofan region, now a strategic frontline between RSF-held Darfur and the Sudanese army and its allies in central, northern, and eastern Sudan making battles here pivotal to the war's future course.

Administratively, Greater Kordofan is divided into three states: North, South, and West. North Kordofan serves as a vital link between Khartoum, White Nile, and the northern Darfur desert. South Kordofan borders East Darfur, while West Kordofan is notable for, among other things, its population's strong military

tradition.

The army maintains a firm presence in Kordofan, with four key divisions. The most important is the 5th Division, known as the “Hajjana,” based in El-Obeid. It is followed in strategic value by the 14th Division in Kadugli, the 10th Division in Abu Jubayhah, and the 22nd Division in Babanusa.

Control Map

The army retains control over the oil fields in Heglig and its bases in Babanusa, West Kordofan. Meanwhile, the RSF controls several cities Al-Fula, Al-Mujlad, Al-Meram, Lagawa, Al-Khuwai, Al-Nuhud, and Wad Banda where it governs through loyal local militias rather than deploying its own forces directly.

In North Kordofan, currently the epicenter of fighting, the army controls the route from the White Nile state, including Umm Rawaba and Rahad, leading to El-Obeid and northwards to Umm Dam Haj Ahmed and the outskirts of Bara. RSF, for its part, controls Umm Sayala, stretching to Jabra Al-Sheikh, Hamrat Al-Sheikh, Al-Mazroub, and Sodari, and southwards to Kazqil.

From Kazqil, RSF’s control extends into South Kordofan, specifically the areas of Al-Hammadi, Al-Dibaybat, and the Tiba Triangle, which it encircles from Dilling and Kadugli. However, the army retains control over eastern South Kordofan, including Dalam, Al-Tadamun, Rashad, Abu Kershola, Al-Liri, Talodi, and Kalogi.

Joint control between RSF and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N), now allied with RSF, exists in small zones such as Khor Al-Waral near Abu Kershola. SPLM-N independently controls the mountains east of Kadugli, westward to its stronghold in Kauda.

A Steadfast Pillar

Each army division comprises at least three infantry brigades, with each brigade including around 3,500 soldiers organized into battalions and companies, as well as specialized units like signal corps, reconnaissance, armored units, logistics, air defense, engineering, and medical teams, according to an army officer who spoke to Noon Post.

He explained that the smallest operational unit currently consists of three squads forming a platoon, three platoons forming a company, and three companies making up a battalion. The 5th Division in El-Obeid is the most complete in terms of manpower, officers, and logistical support compared to the other army divisions in Kordofan.

The 5th Division includes a full-fledged airbase and comprises the 1st, 2nd, 9th, and 18th Infantry Brigades. It also serves as the headquarters of the Central Command, which relocated its operations leadership there at the end of last

month.

With a storied history of open-field combat, the 5th Division's troops excel in fast mobility using open-bed pickup trucks, horses, and camels to traverse rugged terrain.

Over the past two years, El-Obeid has endured a brutal siege by the RSF. Yet, the 5th Division has successfully repelled all RSF attacks, finally breaking the blockade on February 23, 2025, by retaking Umm Rawaba and Rahad its main supply route.

Although RSF still encircles El-Obeid from nearby locations where battles are currently ongoing in Kazqil, Bara, Umm Sayala, Jabal Abu Sunun, Al-Ayara, and Abu Qoud on the road to West Kordofan these positions have limited impact given the army's sustained reinforcements and supply flow.

El-Obeid now hosts most of the army's allied forces, including the Joint Forces (comprised of Darfur rebel groups), Sudan Shield Forces, Special Task Forces, and the Al-Bara bin Malik Legion, as well as army reserves underlining its strategic importance in securing Khartoum and central Sudan.

Other Strongholds

RSF has besieged the 22nd Division in Babanusa, West Kordofan, since the conflict began, yet it has failed to breach its defenses after three waves of attacks. In recent days, RSF has intensified its efforts, but the division's commanders remain determined to hold out.

The 22nd Division includes several key infantry brigades deployed across West Kordofan. These include the 18th Brigade in Al-Nuhud, the 89th in Babanusa, the 90th in oil-rich Heglig near the South Sudan border, the 91st in Al-Fula, and the 92nd its largest brigade spread across Al-Meram, Al-Hiluf, Al-Qaranti, and Al-Mujlad.

South Kordofan is the only Sudanese state hosting two divisions due to its long history of suppressing rebellions in South Sudan and later in the Nuba Mountains. The 14th Division in Kadugli includes an airbase and commands the 55th Brigade (Kadugli), the 54th (Dilling), and the 53rd (Habilla).

In Abu Jubayhah, the 10th Division operates with the 158th Artillery Brigade, the 38th Brigade in Abu Kershola, and the 39th in Talodi. This division has remained largely unscathed and now benefits from open supply lines via Al-Abbasiya following the army's recapture of Umm Rawaba.

In addition to regular army bases, Kordofan hosts newly formed units composed of volunteers who enlisted after the war began. The army has opened training camps across government-controlled areas to accommodate fresh recruits.

Thus, the army does not appear to be suffering from manpower or supply shortages. It seems to be awaiting the end of the rainy season, which currently provides RSF with natural cover and vegetation. Once conditions dry up, RSF movements will be more exposed to army intelligence and surveillance drones.

The New Campaign

Earlier this week, the army recaptured Umm Dam Haj Ahmed and Kazqil. Two days later, it reached Bara and Umm Sayala. However, RSF quickly mobilized reinforcements and retook Umm Sayala in battles that left Sudan Shield Forces commander Abu Aqla Kekal wounded.

Sudan Shield Forces announced they had completed the first phase of the army's plan to uproot the RSF insurgency and destroy its capabilities in North Kordofan, achieving the tactical objective of inflicting severe losses on RSF personnel, equipment, and vehicles paving the way for subsequent operations.

The following day, the army reported significant advances across all Kordofan fronts. Army formations, joint forces, and support units fought intense battles, inflicting losses on RSF and ultimately securing vital positions while repositioning according to their strategic plan.

These operations in North Kordofan bear resemblance to earlier battles in Al-Jazira and Khartoum earlier this year—marked by swift strikes, severing supply routes, blocking reinforcements, and scattering RSF fighters before repositioning.

The army is now adapting these tactics to Kordofan's open terrain, using forces that match RSF in mobility, firepower, and aerial coverage via drones. This strategy prioritizes attrition draining RSF's manpower, ammunition, and fuel while exploiting logistical errors.

During these operations, the army has managed to deprive RSF of its key advantage: launching multi-pronged assaults under long-range shelling and drone cover. RSF has resorted to disorganized withdrawals and defensive tactics, increasing its vulnerability to costly mistakes.

One critical feature of these battles is their location in depopulated areas. RSF forcibly displaced most residents of North Kordofan and can no longer use civilians as human shields.

Unlike the RSF, which seeks to secure desert supply routes bordering North Kordofan and protect its Darfur strongholds fortifying its Kordofan positions with earthworks and air defenses the army aims to reassert state authority across all of Sudan.

It appears to be preparing to advance toward North Darfur from El-Obeid via three routes: from Al-Khuwai and Al-Nuhud to Umm Kadada and El-Fasher; from

Bara to Mellit and then El-Fasher; and through lifting the siege on Babanusa and progressing to Al-Dibaybat and eventually Ed Daein.

The army currently maintains secure supply lines from El-Obeid to its forward positions and can evacuate wounded soldiers to a fully equipped military hospital in the city an advantage the RSF lacks.

The battles in North Kordofan should not be viewed as isolated skirmishes. They mark a potential turning point in Sudan's balance of power. Should RSF triumph, it may once again threaten Khartoum. But if the army prevails, it will sever RSF's supply lines in the northern Darfur desert and could decisively end the war.

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